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PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHEK #1302/01 2511125
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P 081125Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8118
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 1178
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 0168
RUEHG/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0297
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2116
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1498
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHB/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001302

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL KG

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARIAN TEKEBAYEV ARRESTED FOR
SMUGGLING DRUGS; OPPOSITION CLAIMS SET-UP

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Classified By: DCM Lee Litzenberger, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Former Speaker of Parliament and outspoken government critic Omurbek Tekebayev was arrested September 5 at the Warsaw airport. He was allegedly carrying in his luggage a matryoshka doll filled with heroin. When the story broke in Kyrgyzstan the afternoon of September 7, opposition members immediately claimed that the government had set up Tekebayev. Airport surveillance video shown in Parliament September 8 purported to show Tekebayev's luggage being taken by airport personnel from the VIP lounge to a separate room prior to being loaded on the plane (Post has obtained a copy of the video). Parliament has formed a special commission to investigate the case, and President Bakiyev has ordered a joint commission of MFA and Procurator General's Office representatives to travel to Poland to provide assistance to Tekebayev. NGO leaders held a press conference to express full support for Tekebayev. We find it implausible that Tekebayev would have been smuggling heroin, and if the taped evidence holds up, the government will have some serious explaining to do. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Late in the afternoon of September 7, the news broke in Bishkek that former Speaker of Parliament and current opposition MP Omurbek Tekebayev had been detained September 5 by Polish authorities at the Warsaw airport after they found a matryoshka doll with 600 grams of heroin in his luggage. Tekebayev had traveled the same day from Bishkek via Istanbul along with MP Yuri Danilov and Prof. Zainidin Kurmanov to attend an economic conference in Poland. Kurmanov (who spoke to NGO contacts in Bishkek) said he thought Polish authorities had been tipped off, as they went directly to the Kyrgyz delegation's luggage and immediately questioned them. Danilov and Kurmanov were not detained.

¶3. (SBU) Reaction to the news in Bishkek was swift and incredulous. Diplomatic contacts and others who have worked closely with him completely doubted that Tekebayev would smuggle drugs. Given the long-term animosity between Tekebayev and President Bakiyev, several NGO leaders and opposition MPs immediately charged that Tekebayev had been set-up and that the entire episode was a government

"provocation" against the opposition. Tekebayev has been an outspoken critic of the government, and he served as Speaker of Parliament until he was forced out of that position in February following a public dispute with the president. He is also scheduled to be a prominent participant in the September 17 "Kurultai," an opposition rally in Aksy district.

¶ 14. (SBU) An emergency session of Parliament September 8 produced fireworks. Deputy Speaker Tairbek Sarpashev presented surveillance video from Bishkek's Manas International Airport. Late on September 7, Sarpashev and another MP went to Manas Airport and pulled out the archive recordings from the morning of Tekebayev's outbound flight to Istanbul. As narrated by Sarpashev, the tapes show Tekebayev's bag being taken by airport personnel from the VIP lounge toward the check-in area, along with other bags from the VIP lounge. Tekebayev's bag, however, was separated from the other bags and taken to another room; it was then brought back to the check-in area 15 minutes later. Head of Airport Security (and former SNB official) Nadir Mamyrov, the shift chief from the VIP lounge, and a police officer (who previously worked at the airport) were observed showing an interest in Tekebayev's bag.

¶ 15. (U) Parliament appointed a five-member commission to investigate the case, and five MPs will travel to Warsaw September 9 to provide assistance to Tekebayev. President Bakiyev also ordered a joint commission of MFA and Procurator General's Office representatives to travel to Poland to provide diplomatic and legal assistance to Tekebaev.

¶ 16. (SBU) Following the Parliamentary session, there was pandemonium as MPs and other government officials rushed to give press interviews. SNB Chief Bursumankul Tabaldiyev, who attended the session, said that it was in "everyone's best

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interest" to look into the details of the case. NGO Coalition leader Edil Baisalov charged that the entire event had been a provocation, and he called on the government to make a statement of support for Tekebayev. He urged journalists to follow "ethical norms" in their coverage of the story. He urged people to "remain calm" and let the investigation go forward. Prime Minister Kulov said he was confident of Tekebayev's innocence. Not all reaction, however, has been as measured. Tekebayev's supporters blocked the Osh-Bishkek road for several hours, and opposition MP Melis Eshimkanov reportedly has called for a protest rally on September 11.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT: The story resembles the plotline of a bad movie: drugs inside matryoshka doll? Intrigue at the airport caught on surveillance video? If the drugs were planted on Tekebayev, it was an incredibly stupid move by his political opponents. Tekebayev's fellow parliamentarians were quick to offer support, and even President Bakiyev offered support to his long-time enemy -- though perhaps this was done to minimize political fall-out.

¶ 18. (C) COMMENT CON'T: Post obtained a copy of the surveillance tapes from Tekebayev's Ata-Meken Party, and Edil Baisalov told us that he will post the video to his Internet blog. We are not in a position to judge the validity of all portions of the video, but it does clearly show Tekebayev arriving in the VIP lounge with his luggage and it does show what appears to be Tekebayev's bag being taken away by an airport employee in a different direction from the other bags.

¶ 19. (C) COMMENT CON'T: We agree with nearly everyone else in Kyrgyzstan that it is extremely unlikely that Tekebayev was smuggling drugs, but we should point out that his brother was convicted in 1996, and amnestied shortly thereafter, for possession of 8.5 kilograms of opium. The surveillance video appears to present pretty damning evidence of a set up, and if it holds up, the government will have some serious

explaining to do. END COMMENT.
YOVANOVITCH